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ABSTRACT

Although previous research has attempted to account for the incidence of physical violence between dating partners, little attention has been devoted to the relationship factors that may account for the occurrence of violence between partners. To examine the relationships among violence and dating partners' love and liking, commitment to the relationship, and positive feelings, 270 undergraduate students (95 males; 175 females) completed a questionnaire packet. The packet included the following measures: the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), the Positive Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ), the Broderick Commitment Scale (BCS), and the Liking and Love Scales. Analysis of results showed 38 percent of the females reported being victims of courtship violence and 49 percent reported violence against a partner. Fifty percent of the males reported being victims of courtship violence and 30 percent reported being physically violent against a dating partner. The relationship between a history and current experiences of overall and severe aggression and victimization was highly significant for both men and women. Liking proved to be the most consistent distinguishing characteristic of male and female victims and agressors; it appears that decreased liking is a consequence rather than a cause of violence. These findings suggest that violent relationships seem to be characterized by men from violent families who have low liking or respect for their partners and women who have low liking or respect and low positive feelings for their partners. The longer the relationship, the more likely that violence will take place. (KGB)

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Prevalence and Correlates of Courtship Violence

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Prevalence and Correlates of Courtship Violence

Physical violence among family members is surprisingly widespread. It has been estimated that the rates of interpersonal violence are as high as 60% (Gelles, 1974; Walker, 1979) and even conservative estimates indicate that almost 30% of married women in the U.S. are victims of physical violence at some point during marriage (Straus, 1978).

Recent attention has been devoted to the prevalence of violent behavior among dating partners. Makepeace (1981) took the initial step in examining violence between men and women who were dating and found that 21% of an unmarried, undergraduate sample had at least one direct personal experience of courtship violence since they had begun to date. Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher and Lloyd (1982) found that 22% of their college student sample reported being victims of premarital violence or being violent with a premarital partner. More recently, as many as 52% of college students reported experiencing violence, as either the victims or perpetrators, in the context of a dating relationship (Comins, 1984).

An investigation of the prevalence of courtship violence among high school students (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd & Christopher, (1983) showed that 12% of the respondents had experienced some type of physical violence with a dating partner as either victim or aggressor. Further, among couples assessed within a month prior to marriage, 30% of the females and 35% of the males reported being victims of some form of physical violence on, at least, one occasion during the year prior to the assessment (Arias & O'Leary, 1984).

Researchers have attempted to accont for the incidence of physical violence among dating partners by examining intrapersonal factors such as life stressors (Makepeace, 1983), alcohol use/abuse, and low self-esteem (Comins, 1984). Little attention has been devoted to relationship factors that may account for the occurrence of violence among intimately related partners or that characterize violent partners. In the present study, we assessed the prevalence of courtship violence among college students. We were primarily interested in examining the association between relationship variables and physical violence among dating couples. Specifically, we examined the relationship between violence among dating partners and (1) the extent of love and liking for the partner, (2) commitment to the relationship and (3) positive feelings for the partner. Given the consistent significance in past research, we assessed exposure of the role of family violence in marital violence to interparental physical aggression in the family of origin and its relationship to the occurrence of violence in a current relationship.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of 270 (95 males and 175 females) undergraduate introductory psychology students. Females, on the average, were 18 years

old, began to date when they were approximately 15 years old and had been involved in approximately three steady relationships in the past. Sixty-six percent of the females were involved in dating relationships at the time of the study for a mean period of one year. Males, on the average, were 18 years old, began to date when they were approximately 15 years old, and had been involved in approximately four past steady relationships. Forty-nine percent of the males were involved in dating relationships at the time of the study for a mean period of eight months.

Procedure and Instruments

Data for the study were collected by means of a questionnaire packet. The packet assessed demographic characteristics and included the following measures.

Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The CTS (Straus, 1979) is a self-administered 18-item scale assessing behaviors that an individual might engage in during the course of an argument with one's partner. These behaviors range from discussing an issue calmly to using a knife or gun in attempting to resolve the argument. Subjects, typically, are instructed to indicate the frequency of occurrence of each of the 18 behaviors using a scale ranging from "never" to "more than 20 times during a year". Additionally, subjects in this study were asked to indicate the frequency with which their partners engaged in any of the 18 behaviors on the CTS during an argument with them.

Positive Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ). The PFQ was designed to assess positive affect or love toward one's mate. The questionnaire is reliable, sensitive to treatment changes and correlated highly with other measures of relationship satisfaction (O'Leary & Arias, 1983; O'Leary, Fincham & Turkewitz, 1983).

Broderick Commitment Scale (BCS). The BCS is a one-time measure instructing respondents to rate themselves on a "0" to "100" scale to indicate how committed they are to their relationship. This scale has been found to be significantly associated with several indices of relationship satisfaction (Beach & Broderick, 1983).

Liking and Love Scales. The Liking and Love Scales consist of 13 questions each representing moderately correlated, but nevertheless distinct, dimensions of an individual's attitude toward another person (Rubin, 1970). The Love Scale includes items that assess thoughts, feelings and behavioral predispositions related to romantic love. The items on the Liking scale tap respect toward another as assessed by the favorable evaluation of the other person on dimensions such as adjustment, maturity, good judgment and intelligence, and the tendency to view the other person as similar to oneself.

Results

Prevalence

The prevalence of physical abuse was quite high among men and women

in the present sample. Thirty-eight percent of the female respondents

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reported being victims of courtship violence at some point in their dating histories while 49% reported violence against a partner. Fifty percent of the males respondents reported being victims of courtship violence at

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some point in their dating histories while 30% reported being physically violent against a dating partner. The difference between men and women's self-reports of history of courtship aggression was significant, X^2 (1)= 7.16, $p < .01$. There was a trend, X^2 (1)=3.13, p=.08, for a greater percentage of men than women to report a history of victimization.

Of the women involved in a current exclusively dating relationship, 16% reported being victims of violentce while 32% reported physically aggressing against the current dating partner. Forty-nine percent of the men in current exclusive dating relationships reported being victims of violence while 30% reported aggressing against their current partners. A significantly greater percentage of men than women reported victimization in a current relationship, X^2 (1)=5.55, $p < .05$; there was no difference between men and women's reports of overall aggression in a current relationship. The relationship between historical and current experiences of overall aggression and victimization was highly significant for both men and women.

Focusing on severe violence, 27% of the men and 8% of the women reported victimization at some point during their dating histories; this difference was significant, X^2 (1)=14.90, p=.0001. In a current relationship, 23% of the men and 3% of the women reported being victims of severe aggression; again, this difference was significant, X^2 (1)=12.38, $p < .001$. Ten percent of the men and 19% of the women reported engaging in severe violence against a dating partner at some point during their dating histories; this difference approached significance, X^2 (1)=3.60, p=.06. Ten percent of both men and women reported engaging in severe violence against their current dating partners. The relationship between historical and current experiences of severe aggression and victimization was highly significant for both men and women.

Correlates

Analyses examining the influence of exposure to interparental violence on subjects' violence considered exclusive victimization, i.e.,

reported being a victim but not an aggressor, and exclusive aggression, i.e., reported aggressing against a partner, but not being aggressed against, as the dependent variables. Subjects reporting both victimization and aggression were excluded since it is not clear whether or not aggression in these cases is in self-defense and whether or not victimization in these cases is subsequent to initiation of violence by the individual reporting victimization. Consequently, it is not clear whether or not and, if so, in what fashion an individual's family background would be related to that individual's behavior when she/he is responding primarily to another.

Ten percent of the men and 11% of the women reported having mothers who were violent in their marriages. Twelve percent of the men and 14% of the women reported having fathers who were violent in their marriages. The differences between men and women's reports of interparental violence were not significant.

Confirming past research, there was no significant relationship between women's historical or current victimization or aggression and interparental violence. Consistent with past research, a greater percentage of men exposed to fathers who were abusive with their wives than men not so exposed reported a history of dating violence; 10% vs. 1%, respectively, X^2 (1)=4.60, $p < .05$. Similarly, there was a trend for a greater percentage of men who had either violent fathers or violent mothers then men with nonviolent parents to report a history of aggression; 15% vs. 1%, x^2 (1)=3.06, p=.08. Men's violence in a current relationship was not related to exposure to interparental violence.

As can be seen in Table 3, women's current victimization and aggres-

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sion is related to a greater number of variables than men's experiences of courtship violence. Women who reported being victims of violence in current relationships had known and dated their current partners for a longer period of time (r=.28, df=102, $p < .01$ and r=.25, df=100, $p < .01$, respectively), liked their partners less (r=-.29, df=102, $p < .01$), and felt less positively toward their partners (r=-.16, df=102, $p < .05$) than women who did not report victimization. Women who reported violence against a current partner likewise had known and dated their partners longer (r=.27, df=100, $p < .01$ and r=.29, df=98, $p < .01$, respectively), liked their partners less (r=-.28, df=100, $p < .01$), and felt less positively toward their current partners (r=-.19, df=100, $p < .05$) than women who did not report engaging in violence.

Men who reported being victims of violence liked their partners less than those not reporting victimization, r=-.29, df=38, $p < .05$. Men who reported engaging in violence against their current dating partners had

dated their partners longer than nonviolent men, r=.30, df=36, p .05. Feelings of romantic love, commitment to the relationship or feelings of superiority/inferiority vis a vis the partner failed to be related to victimization of aggression reports of men or women.

Discussion

The prevalence of physical violence among dating college students in this sample was quite high. These data confirmed past findings with married couples (Rosenbaum & O'Leary 1981) and partners engaged to be married (Arias & O'Leary, 1984) that exposure to interparental physical aggression is a significant predictor of men's likelihood of engaging in physically violent behavior in a current heterosexual relationship. Regarding relationship variables, liking proved to be the most consistent distinguishing characteristic of male and female victims and aggressors. The data analyzed in this study are cross-sectional in nature, and, as such, directionality remains a problem. However, it seems likely that aggressors' and victims' decreased liking for their partners is a consequence rather than a cause of physical violence. If so, it seems reasonable to speculate that in time the continuing occurrence of physical violence might result in decrements in commitment, positive feelings for the partner, and feelings of romantic love. In fact, for women, who had been dating their current partners longer than men, positive feelings toward the partner were lower in violent relationships than nonviolent ones.

In sum, violent relationships seem to be characterized by men from violent families who have low liking or respect for their partners and women who have low liking or respect and low positive feelings for their partners. Additionally, it might seem that the lengthier the relationship, the more likely it will be that violence will take place. It remains to be seen what variables account for the maintenance of violent relationship deficient in positive feelings.

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TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	MEN (N=95)	WOMEN (N=175)
MEAN AGE	18 YRS.	18 YRS.
MEAN AGE WHEN FIRST BEGAN DATING	15 YRS.	15 YRS.
MEAN NUMBER OF PAST STEADY RELATIONSHIPS	4	3
PERCENTAGE CURRENTLY DATING EXCLUSIVELY	49%	66%
MEAN LENGTH OF ACQUAINTANCESHIP WITH CURRENT DATING PARTNER	15 MOS.	25 MOS.
MEAN LENGTH OF CURRENT EXCLUSIVE STEADY RELATIONSHIP	8 MOS.	13 MOS.

TABLE 2

PREVALENCE OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE: VICTIMIZATION

	HISTORICAL		CURRENT	
	MEN (N=95)	WOMEN (N=175)	MEN (N=47)	WOMEN (N=116)
OVERALL VIOLENCE	50%	38%	49%	26%*
SEVERE VIOLENCE	27%	8%****	23%	3%***
EXCLUSIVE OVERALLL VIOLENCE	23%	10%**	23%	8%*
EXCLUSIVE SEVERE VIOLENCE	19%	3%****	18%	1%***

*P < .05
**P < .01
***P < .001
****P < .0001

TABLE 3

PREVALENCE OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE: AGGRESSION

	HISTORICAL		CURRENT	
	MEN (N=95)	WOMEN (N=175)	MEN (N=47)	WOMEN (M=116)
OVERALL VIOLENCE	30%	49%*	30%	32%
SEVERE VIOLENCE	10%	19%	10%	10%
EXCLUSIVE OVERALL VIOLENCE	3%	22%**	3%	14%
EXCLUSIVE SEVERE VIOLENCE	1%	14%*	3%	8%

*p < .01
**p < .001

TABLE 4

SIGNIFICANT CORRELATES OF MEN AND WOMEN'S VICTIMIZATION AND AGGRESSION IN CURRENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS

VICTIMIZATION		AGGRESSION	
MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
LIKING (R=-.29)	LENGTH OF ACQUAINTANCESHIP (R=.28)	LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP (R=.30)	LENGTH OF ACQUAINTANCESHIP (R=.27)
	LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP (R=.25)		LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP (R=.29)
	LIKING (R=-.29)		LIKING (R=-.28)
	POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARD PARTNER (R=-.16)		POSITIVE FEELINGS TOWARD PARTNER (R=-.19)